



NEWS

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PRESIDENT CLINTON PROPOSES RECORD \$1.4 BILLION BUDGET FOR U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

President Clinton is proposing a record \$1.42 billion budget for the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Fiscal Year 1999, including \$826.3 million, an 11-percent increase, in appropriated funding to support the Service's endangered species, national wildlife refuges, migratory bird, fisheries, land acquisition, construction and other programs.

"The President's budget reflects how important the work of the Fish and Wildlife Service is to the American people," Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said. "Americans have an unmatched love and appreciation of fish and wildlife and this budget recognizes the need to actively manage these priceless resources if they are to remain healthy."

"From the conservation of endangered species to management of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the President's budget represents a strong commitment to the work of the Service to conserve fish and wildlife for the benefit of all."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency with responsibility for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats. The Service manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, which includes 512 national wildlife refuges and covers nearly 93 million acres, as well as 64 national fish hatcheries.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, conserves and restores wildlife habitat, administers the Endangered Species Act, and oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

"The Service's priorities in the coming year include the effective management of the Endangered Species Act, continued improvement in the health of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and healing of our Nation's degraded rivers and other aquatic ecosystems," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "The President's budget addresses each of these priorities."

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The proposed budget calls for \$675.8 million for the Service's resource management programs, an \$80.9 million or 13.6 percent increase over 1998 appropriations.

The Administration proposes to increase overall funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System \$25.9 million, or 11.7 percent, to \$246.4 million. Within this amount, \$199.8 million will be for refuge operations, an increase of \$15 million over FY 1998.

This will help fund 232 new projects at 152 refuges and wetland management districts to recover endangered species; restore or improve more than 54,000 acres of habitat; serve 1.1 million new visitors; expand partnerships with public and private organizations; and hire 87 refuge management, biological, and maintenance staff.

The President is also requesting \$46.6 million for refuge maintenance, which is \$10.9 million, or 30 percent, above FY 1998 appropriations. This will help reduce the system's longstanding maintenance backlog by supporting approximately 200 maintenance projects at 140 refuges and wetland management districts.

The President's budget also includes \$60.5 million for land acquisition that will add more than 43,000 acres to the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The budget proposes \$112.9 million for the Service's Endangered Species program, an increase of \$35.8 million, or 46 percent. The additional funding will support more effective implementation of the Act, strengthen partnerships with other public agencies and private interests, and increase the flexibility and certainty provided to private landowners.

The new funding will be used to further Administration policies that take advantage of the flexibility built into the Act to balance conservation with economic development and to begin implementing any new statutory requirements Congress might include in reauthorization of the Act. The budget calls for an additional \$2.5 million, or a 44 percent increase, for the Candidate Conservation program to better manage threats to declining species and their habitats before they require listing as threatened or endangered.

To date, the Service has entered into 40 candidate conservation agreements with private landowners and state and local governments, benefitting more than 200 species and preventing the listing of 5 species. In FY 1999, the Service expects to implement additional agreements that will help protect 80 more species and preclude the listing of 20 new species.

The proposed budget for listing activities would climb \$2.3 million, or 44 percent, to \$7.5 million to address increasing numbers of listing actions and litigation caseloads.

The consultation budget would increase \$12.6 million, or 53 percent, to \$36.5 million, allowing the Service to review more than 40,000 Federal actions and conduct 1,750 programmatic consultations affecting endangered species. Another primary use of the increase would be to establish an additional 100 to 175 habitat conservation plans, agreements with landowners that allow economic development to continue while conserving endangered species. The total number of HCPs -- both established and new -- will cover hundreds of species on more than 9 million acres.

The President's budget for endangered species recovery efforts would increase \$13.4 million, or 31 percent, to \$55.8 million to support "Safe Harbor" agreements, develop recovery plans, and support reclassification and delisting actions. The Service expects 150 Safe Harbor agreements will be in some stage of development or implementation during FY 1999. These agreements provide private landowners with assurances that voluntary conservation actions taken on their land will not lead to further restrictions on economic development in the future.

Included in the endangered species budget is \$2 million to meet the candidate conservation, listing, consultation, and recovery needs for the Mexican spotted owl, southwestern willow flycatcher, and other wildlife and plant species native to the Southwest under the Southwest Ecosystem Initiative, a cooperative agreement with the Agriculture and Defense Departments. The budget also provides additional funding for the Platte River and Columbia River Basin programs.

The President also is proposing a \$3 million, or 50 percent, increase in assistance to the states for habitat conservation planning land acquisition under the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund.

The Administration is proposing to increase funding for the Service's Fisheries program by \$4.4 million, or 6 percent. The additional funds would be used to support the Southwest Ecosystem Initiative, aquatic nuisance species control, aquatic habitat restoration projects, and projects to improve fish passage in streams and rivers.

The Administration also is proposing an increase of \$5.7 million, or 10 percent, to \$64.9 million for the Service's habitat conservation programs. An additional \$900,000 would be used to address an additional 40 to 50 major water development projects that are scheduled for relicensing by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The budget would designate an additional \$2.5 million for Partners for Fish and Wildlife, a program to help private landowners voluntarily restore wetlands on their property as part of the Clean Water and Watershed Restoration Initiative. An additional \$1 million is requested to assess how pesticides and other contaminants are affecting wildlife and habitat on national wildlife refuges.

Meanwhile, the budget proposes a \$1.3 million increase, or 7 percent, for the Service's migratory bird management programs. This includes \$300,000 to support the Southwest Initiative, \$400,000 to begin implementing the recent amendments to the U.S.-Canada migratory bird protocol, and \$200,000 to address the problem of overabundant populations of snow geese and the ecological damage they are doing to their arctic nesting grounds.

In addition, the budget includes a \$3 million, or 26 percent, increase for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, as part of the Clean Water and Watershed Restoration Initiative, to support voluntary partnerships to conserve and restore wetland ecosystems throughout North America. The \$14.7 million budget would generate an estimated \$29 million in matching funds from partners and allow acquisition, restoration, or enhancement of 245,000 acres of wetlands.

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